

West German hostage update, 28 Jan 87

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Chancellor Kohl has appointed an interagency working group to investigate the kidnappings. The group is chaired by chancellery chief Schaeuble and includes state secretaries from the Foreign, Justice, and Interior Ministries as well as government press spokesman Ost.

The group apparently will also examine the US request for the extradition of Hammadi, but for now the Kohl government still is trying to buy time on the issue. An appeals court in Frankfurt is to rule on the US request after hearing arguments from the government and Hammadi's defense. The court is likely to approve the request, but the proceedings are likely to take about two weeks, according to the US Embassy.

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The Kohl government still must make the final decision on extradition, and it apparently is divided on the issue. Schaeuble has told US officials that Bonn will not be blackmailed by the terrorists. But he also has made clear -- without saying so explicitly or providing details -- that

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an intense debate is raging within the government over extradition. He implied to Ambassador Burt that Washington is asking Bonn to take a more "purist" position on the hostages than is the US or France, even to the point of accepting the near-certain murder of the West German captives. Schaeuble also asked whether Washington would support a trade of Hammadi in exchange for American as well as West German hostages. [REDACTED]

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-- The Kohl government fears that a hostage deal would seriously harm relations with the US, and it hopes that including American hostages would overcome Washington's opposition.

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Kohl has authorized the working group to handle negotiations with the abductors, but it is unclear whether Bonn has offered or accepted a deal with the terrorists.

-- Schaeuble told Burt that West Germany was using two channels of undetermined reliability to establish contact with them.

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-- The US Embassy in Damascus is convinced, despite West German denials, that a senior West German intelligence officer visited Damascus on 23-24 January to discuss the kidnappings. He met with Syrian officials, Libyan number-two man Jallud, Amal leader Nabih Barri, and a representative of the Abu Nidal group, according to press sources cited by the Embassy.

The kidnappers of the West German nationals reportedly have set a deadline of two weeks for the exchange of the hostages for Hammadi. In the meantime, Bonn has imposed a

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news blackout on the crisis. It is particularly concerned that any leaks concerning US-West German contacts on the issue would endanger the lives of the West German captives.